

Crime and Disorder Select Committee

Scrutiny Review of Membership of Local Government Bodies

October 2017

Crime and Disorder Select Committee
Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council
Municipal Buildings
Church Road
Stockton-on-Tees
TS18 1LD

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Select Committee – Membership

Councillor David Wilburn (Chair)
Councillor Rowling (Vice-Chair)
Councillor Clark
Councillor Dixon
Councillor Mitchell
Councillor Vickers
Councillor Walmsley
Councillor Whitehill
Councillor Woodhouse

Contact Officer

Judy Trainer, Scrutiny Team Leader
Tel: 01642 528158
Email: judith.trainer@stockton.gov.uk

Scope

Which of our strategic corporate objectives does this topic address?

The review will also contribute to the following Council Plan 2017-2020 key objectives:

Our Council

- Deliver a balanced and sustainable medium term financial plan
- Ensure the Council uses its assets effectively
- Develop and ensure delivery of a robust governance framework
- Continue to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of our services

What are the main issues and overall aim of this review?

Following on from the previous scrutiny review of membership of outside bodies, this review would further examine the overall spend and benefit derived from membership to determine value for money, with reference to:

APSE – Association of Public Service Excellence

LGA – Local Government Association

NEPO – North East Purchasing Organisations

NEREO – North East Regional Employers Organisation

SIGOMA – Special Interest Group of Municipal Authorities

The Committee will undertake the following key lines of enquiry:

What is the level of use of outside bodies?
What benefits are derived from membership?
How best can information and learning be shared?
Does membership represent value for money?
Is representation appropriate?

What information do we need?

Existing information (background information, existing reports, legislation, central government documents, etc.):

- Membership costs and trends
- Services and benefits from membership
- Frequency of meetings, representation etc.

New information:

- Officer and Member Feedback on benefits of membership

Who can provide us with further relevant evidence? (Cabinet Member, officer, service user, general public, expert witness, etc.)

What specific areas do we want them to cover when they give evidence?

Finance

SBC Managers and Members

Cost of current membership

Qualitative feedback on benefits of membership

Foreword



Councillor David Wilburn
Chair



Councillor Paul Rowling
Vice Chair

1.0 Introduction

1.1 This report presents Cabinet with the outcomes of the Scrutiny Review of Membership of Local Government Bodies, undertaken by the Committee during the Municipal Year 2016/17. The topic was identified for review at Scrutiny Liaison Forum and included in the Work Programme by Executive Scrutiny Committee.

1.2 The review was specifically concerned with the following local government bodies:

LGA – Local Government Association
SIGOMA – Special Interest Group of Municipal Authorities
NEPO – North East Purchasing Organisations
NEREO – North East Regional Employers Organisation
APSE – Association of Public Service Excellence

1.3 The main issues which were being examined by the Select Committee were:

- What is the level of use of outside bodies?
- What benefits are derived from membership?
- How best can information and learning be shared?
- Does membership represent value for money?
- Is representation appropriate?

1.4 The Committee took evidence from the Councillors appointed to the local government bodies and sought feedback from the Council's Senior Management Team on the key lines of enquiry. Feedback was provided verbally or in writing to the Select Committee.

2.0 Evidence

Local Government Association (LGA) General Assembly

Members appointed: Leader Deputy Leader Cllr Patterson David Wilburn	Cost of membership: £35,779 The cost of membership to SIGOMA is £3,000.
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2.1 The LGA acts as the "Parliament" of local government. Every local authority in membership is entitled to representation on the General Assembly.

2.2 A membership organization, the LGA is made up of 415 Authorities. The Association is politically-led and cross-party working on behalf of councils to ensure local government has a voice with national government. The Association aim to influence and set the political agenda on the issues that matter to councils so they are able to deliver local solutions to national problems.

2.3 Key benefits for members include:

- the opportunity to influence our work through membership of boards, panels, commissions, advisory groups or the Councillors' Forum
- access to support and advice for councillors through our political group offices
- access to up-to-the-minute news, briefings and daily news headlines on the LGA website through our suite of subscription e-bulletins
- discounts on selected LGA services, including improvement support and leadership programmes

- support on national media relations including in times of crisis
- access to a wide range of free or discounted events
- access to legal advice, opinions and guidance on complex issues
- opportunities to join one of our many special interest groups, including the District Councils' Network, County Councils' Network or the Special Interest Group of Municipal Authorities
- use of facilities at Local Government House, including free meeting room hire (unavailable from end of October 2016 – September 2017 as the LGA is moving office on 28 October 2016)
- invitations to Royal Garden Parties
- 'first magazine' delivered bi-weekly direct to your home
- Local Futures – free and discounted services provided by research and strategy consultancy specializing in geographically reviewing social and economic change.

2.4 An Annual General Meeting which is held in July each year takes place immediately before the start of the LG Group's Annual Conference.

2.5 SIGOMA is one of the largest interest groups within the LGA (Local Government Association). They represent the interests of authorities and urban communities in the northern, midland and south-coast regions of England.

2.6 SIGOMA represent the interests of their members within the Local Government Association channelling their views to Government and other appropriate bodies, providing a forum for discussion at the highest political level.

2.7 The Group monitor and provide regular updates on areas of common concern to help ensure their members have fair and equitable access to the resources and freedoms they need to build strong, sustainable communities.

2.8 An LGA membership update setting out the benefits for Stockton for 2016/17 is attached at **Appendix 1**.

2.9 Councillors Bob Cook and Jim Beall attended a meeting of the Select Committee and spoke in support of membership of the Association highlighting that:

- Most Councils were members of this cross party politically led organisation
- The Association exerted significant influence and lobbying power and gave access to ministers
- Peer reviews were an invaluable service provided for member Councils providing an opportunity to give support and also learn from others
- The Association had reduced costs and membership fees in recent years
- The Association were an invaluable source of information providing up to date briefings, but they questioned whether the Council was making the most out of the information provided across the Council?
- The Association ran excellent leadership courses which had been attended by a number of Stockton Councillors
- The Annual Conference provided excellent networking opportunities

2.10 Officer Feedback was as follows:

Director of Children's Services – "Children's Services are involved through the Leader's membership of the Children and Young People Committee which is helpful. We are also involved in the LGA peer review arrangements."

Economic Growth and Development Services – "Membership of the LGA within Housing Services is valued."

Deputy Chief Executive – “We have accessed many of the benefits listed above, including Member Development. The LGA lobby on behalf of local government specifically local government finance. The “On the Day Briefing” on the Budget provides relevant and useful information quickly. They have also worked with us on specific issues – the recent Virgin Media Business Rates appeal being a prime example.”

NORTH EAST PROCUREMENT ORGANISATION

Member Appointed: Councillor Bob Cook	Costs of Membership: £76,259.24
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2.11 Since 1976, NEPO has worked in partnership with North East local authorities on the strategic procurement of high value goods and services in order to deliver savings, maximize efficiencies and promote best practice. They also work closely with the region’s supply base to boost competitive skills, signpost tendering opportunities and improve procurement processes.

2.12 Stockton on Tees Borough Council Member Authority Report for 2015/16 is attached at **Appendix 2**. This revealed an annual return on investment of £343,772.19.

2.13 Councillor Bob Cook attended a meeting of the Select Committee and highlighted:

- NEPO had been reviewed in recent years and now focused on a smaller number of specialist areas of procurement
- The organisation strove to encourage local and regional suppliers to tender for work and there were over 600 Stockton companies on their preferred list
- Savings achieved through joint procurement significantly outweighed the costs of membership

2.14 Officer Feedback was as follows:

Economic Growth and Development Services

“Membership with NEPO within Highways Transport and Design Services is valued

We have as an authority received benefits in terms of financial saving from being in a collaboration co-ordinated by them especially recently being part of the Highway Maintenance NE Framework. In addition to the surfacing framework mentioned below, the wider Tees Valley has benefited from the use of NEPO on the collaborative procurement of Highways condition surveys (SCANNER, FNS etc.) and the winter weather station maintenance/bureau service.

The main benefits come from NEPO’s ability to pull together all 12 North East Local Authorities thereby getting efficiencies (lower prices) through economies of scale (especially if the two big authorities of Northumberland and Durham are involved).

Going forward NEPO are hopefully about to embark on a joint procurement exercise for winter weather forecasting which will also provide us with some benefits.

The use of NEPO gives us access to procurement specialist who have a great deal of experience in bringing together clients in order to agree a common specification and outcome which would be a lot harder where one authority to try and do something similar utilising in house resources alone.

We are also exploring the possibility of using NEPO in the future to replace some of our frameworks. If this was not available to us we would have to procure these frameworks ourselves.”

NORTH EAST REGIONAL EMPLOYERS ORGANISATION

<p>Members Appointed: Cllr Cook Cllr McCoy Cllr Woodhead</p>	<p>Costs of Membership: £15,680</p>
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2.15 The North East Regional Employers' Organization is one of eleven regional bodies that support Local Authorities across England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

2.16 NEREO's function is to support local authorities and partner organizations in the fields of Human Resources, Organizational Development and Employee Relations in all their complex and varied forms:

- building capacity in the workforce
- building skills through development opportunities for Officers and Members
- advising on people matters, policy and employment law

Member Feedback

2.17 Councillor Woodhead provided written comments as follows:

“Being a member of NEREO keeps me abreast of employment laws and relationships between Employers and Employees and an explanation of ever changing legislation re working condition and union views. NEREO represents the council as a collective body which gives the council more of a voice than it would as a single body in negotiations. Recent figures produced on cost prove that NEREO is a cost effective organization.”

2.18 Written comments from Councillor Ann McCoy are attached at **Appendix 3**. Councillor Ann McCoy also attended the Select Committee and highlighted that:

- The LGA respect the strong voice of this non-political, regional organisation and ask the organisation what they would like them to lobby about
- The organisation plays a key role in negotiating with trade unions on behalf of all of the 12 North East Councils on the pay claim via collective bargaining. NEREO fulfils this statutory role which would need to be undertaken in another way if the Council was not a member
- The organisation are committed to national conditions of service
- Membership of the organisation allows the Council to access less expensive services
- Membership gives access to HR advice, a jobs portal and peer reviews
- North East campaigns have been run in the past
- The Council have used NEREO to carry out a Senior Management Salary Structure Review

ASSOCIATION OF PUBLIC SERVICE EXCELLENCE

<p>No Members are appointed</p>	<p>Cost of Membership: £3,376</p>
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2.19 APSE (Association for Public Service Excellence) is a not for profit local government body working with over 300 councils throughout the UK. Promoting excellence in public services, APSE is a specialist in local authority frontline services, hosting a network for frontline service

providers in areas such as waste and refuse collection, parks and environmental services, cemeteries and crematorium, environmental health, leisure, school meals, cleaning, housing and building maintenance.

2.20 APSE Energy is included within the Council's corporate APSE subscription recently formed to reflect the changing dynamics of the energy market in the UK. APSE energy is designed to bring councils together to share information, ideas, resources, best practice, and to support local energy projects. Working together enables them to exchange knowledge on finance, law, and procurement. It also helps them to gain greater marketplace leverage. Their bespoke Local Authority Energy Collaboration is a partnership developed by member authorities that maximises the opportunities local authorities are currently offered by bringing councils together on a national scale to work on the green energy agenda. Currently, around 60 councils are members of APSE energy.

2.22 Officer Feedback was as follows:

Director of Community Services

"APSE has a plethora of membership resources that can be drawn on to support service development and improvement, including for example, professional networks, bespoke service advice and guidance, training and access to performance benchmarking across a wide range of frontline services. Specific examples of how Stockton have benefited from this include our attendance and participation in seminars sharing best practice on several topics and our involvement in the performance benchmarking networks to understand how we compare to other local authorities in specific service areas.

Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council and our partners such as Tees Active have improved services directly as a result of these activities.

We have been recognised for our continuous drive to deliver excellent services through the prestigious annual APSE Awards. In the past three years alone we have been recognised as having the best initiatives in the United Kingdom in the following important cross-cutting categories:

2014: Best Housing and Regeneration Initiative for "Mandale: Celebrating 10 Years of Regeneration."

2015: Best Community and Neighbourhood Initiative (including Community Safety) for "Psst....Positively Stockton-on-Tees."

2016: Best Health and Wellbeing Initiative for "The Multi-Disciplinary Service."

In 2010, Stockton-on-Tees was named as "Overall Council of the Year" in the APSE Awards and has made the list of finalists for that coveted award for the last seven years consecutively, which is an unprecedented record of consistent excellence."

Economic Growth and Development Services

"Our membership with APSE within Housing Services and Highways Transport and Design Services is valued

Being a member ensures we get reduced rates to access their conferences/courses. We also get invites to free seminars, which we have attended in the past (and also presented) and these are good networking opportunities. In addition there is also a central portal where LA's can ask questions/queries re services and get feedback often on a national level, which is good for best practice etc. Also there are the awards which SBC have always done well in (inc Council of the Year) which is good for reputation and profile of the Council.

Assistant Director of Adult Social Care:

“Having won a APSE award, our Wellbeing team receives updates and invitations from APSE.”

LGIU (LOCAL GOVERNMENT INFORMATION UNIT)

2.23 Although not a member of the LGIU, the Select Committee asked for information on the benefits of membership in addition to the bodies under the scope of the review.

2.24 The LGIU is an organization with over 200 subscribing organizations. Councillors, officers and academics receive regular briefings and news bulletins. Staff and councillors at member organizations also receive discounts on training events, invitations to exclusive networking events and other services. Members can also contribute to projects, get involved in governance, and directly influence work.

2.25 Locally new members include Durham, Redcar & Cleveland, Hartlepool, Hambleton, South Lakeland - and new triallists include Middlesbrough, Darlington.

2.26 As a unitary under 200k population, the set rate would be £9,995 pa, which would cover access to all benefits (including in-person visits by policy staff to talk through key issues) although there would be a number of discount opportunities if joining with other neighbouring councils and a three month free trial.

3.0 Conclusion

3.1 The Committee found that membership of the bodies under review either provided a return on investment which outweighed the costs of membership or that the costs represented value for money owing to the significant benefits derived from membership including lobbying power, up to date briefings and information, peer support, collective bargaining and joint procurement.

3.2 The Committee felt, however, that there was not a strong enough case for joining the LGIU in view of the information that was already available from other sources.

Recommendation

That the Committee retain membership of the following Local Government Bodies:

LGA – Local Government Association
SIGOMA – Special Interest Group of Municipal Authorities
NEPO – North East Purchasing Organisations
NEREO – North East Regional Employers Organisation
APSE – Association of Public Service Excellence